

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<u>Project Name:</u> Jensen Farms Partnership Break Request	<u>Proposed Implementation Date:</u> January 2013
<u>Proponent:</u> Jensen Farms Partnership, 625 Emmaus Rd, Westby, MT 59275	
<u>Type and Purpose of Action:</u> Jensen Farms Partnership has requested to break 200.3 acres of expired CRP land on State lease #3366. The current CRP contract expired on September 30, 2012. Jensen Farms Partnership wishes to now utilize the expired CRP acreage for small grain production.	
<u>Location:</u> 200.3 acres in the N2 of Section 16 – Twp. 33N – Rge. 57E.	<u>County:</u> Sheridan

I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

<p>1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.</p>	<p>The proponent, Jensen Farms Partnership, submitted a break request in writing to the Glasgow Unit Office (GUO) of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. The request will be reviewed per DNRC land breaking criteria for all lands other than native sod.</p> <p>MT FWP was solicited by the GUO for comment and responded on December 27th, 2012. FWP's comments regarding the habitat as it pertains to vegetative cover are discussed in Section 7 and comments pertaining to wildlife are discussed in Section 8 of this checklist. FWP is generally opposed to breaking of CRP lands that provide substantial benefits to wildlife; however, FWP understands the DNRC and lessee's best interest may be to break up expired CRP land. They provided information regarding cost share programs offered by FWP to entice lessees/landowners to enroll lands into CRP. This information will be passed along by the GUO to lessees inquiring about State land CRP.</p> <p>NRCS and FSA will be involved.</p>
<p>2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:</p>	<p>DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed.</p>
<p>3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:</p>	<p>Action Alternative: Grant the proponent permission to convert 200.3 acres of expired CRP from permanent cover to small grain production.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Deny the proponent permission to convert 200.3 acres of expired CRP from permanent cover to small grain production.</p>

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

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RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS
	<p>N = Not Present or No Impact will occur. Y = Impacts may occur (explain below)</p>
<p>4.GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:</p> <p>Are fragile, compactable or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?</p>	<p>Soils are primarily Williams loam, Williams - Zahill loam complexes. These soils are class III soils and are well suited for farming. The soil types meet all of the DNRC's breaking criteria for lands other than native sod. Removing the permanent cover will make the soil more susceptible to erosion; however, the continuous cropping methods used by our lessee should ensure erosion does not become a problem. No unusual geologic features or fragile, compactable, or unstable soils are present.</p> <p>Action: Removing the permanent vegetation may increase the likelihood of erosion, but erosion is not anticipated to increase if proper farming techniques are implemented. No impacts to the geology or soil characteristics are anticipated. Lessee would be required to reseed all eroding areas to permanent cover if erosion becomes a problem in the future.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the geology or soil characteristics will occur.</p>
<p>5.WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION: Are important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?</p>	<p>Small grain crop production would utilize the soils available water similar to the tame grasses that are present.</p> <p>Action: The project is not anticipated to impact the water quality, quantity, and/or distribution of surface water.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the water quality, quantity, and/or distribution will occur.</p>
<p>6.AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?</p>	<p>Action: No impacts to air quality are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to air quality will occur.</p>
<p>7.VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?</p>	<p>FWP recommended continuing to manage this acreage as permanent cover enrolled in CRP, leaving at least a portion of the acreage as grazing or hayland to provide some permanent cover benefits, or if it is to be broken, they recommended a 100m buffer around drainages and seasonal wetlands.</p> <p>A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program identified the Pale-spiked Lobelia as a plant species of concern within the township surrounding the project area. This plant species requires moist meadows and it is not present within the project area.</p> <p>Action: Vegetation cover would be altered from expiring CRP acreage (tame grass) to annually seeded</p>

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	<p>cropland. No rare plants or cover types are present in the current stand of vegetation.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the vegetation cover, quantity, and/or quality will occur.</p>
<p>8.TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:</p> <p>Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?</p>	<p>A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program identified 15 animal species of concern. All of the listed species are birds and none of the listed species are known to rely on tame grass stands. Wildlife in the area consists of whitetail deer, antelope, mule deer, upland game birds, song birds, migrating waterfowl, small mammals, amphibians, etc. The current stand of CRP grass was likely used for nesting habitat by bird species and as a bedding, resting, and hiding area for the area's wildlife. Removing the CRP will displace the animals into the surrounding landscape. The annual production of small grains would add a food source, for some of the species, to the area.</p> <p>Action: No substantial impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and habitats are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and habitats will occur.</p>
<p>9.UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Sensitive Species or Species of special concern?</p>	<p>A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program identified 15 animal species of concern and 1 plant species of concern within the township surrounding the project area. All of the 15 animals listed are birds. 11 of the bird species rely on wetlands, lakes, rivers and ponds. 4 of the species rely on grasslands and these species include the Baird's Sparrow, Sprague's Pipit, Chestnut-collared Longspur, and Burrowing Owl. The species relying on grasslands may be displaced; however, none of the listed species are anticipated to be impacted by the proposed action. The plant species, Pale-spiked Lobelia, grows in moist meadows. Since the project area consists of uplands, Pale-spiked Lobelia plants will not be impacted.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources will occur.</p>
<p>10.HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?</p>	<p>Action: The acreage proposed to be broken has been disturbed in the past and does not contain any historical, archaeological, and/or paleontological resources.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the areas historical, archeological, and/or paleontological resources will occur.</p>

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11.AESTHETICS: Is the project on a prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light?	<p>The project area currently consists of a mixture of grazing lands, agricultural lands, and CRP lands. This project area is not near a prominent topographic feature, no excessive noise or light would be produced, and it is not visible from a populated or scenic area.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to the areas aesthetics are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the areas aesthetics will occur.</p>
12.DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY: Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?	<p>Action: No impacts to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources will occur.</p>
13.OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?	<p>Action: No impacts to studies, plans, and/or projects are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to studies, plans, and/or projects will occur.</p>

III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?	<p>Action: No impacts to human health and/or safety risks are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to human health and/or safety risks will occur.</p>
15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?	<p>Action: No impacts to industrial and commercial activities are anticipated. Returning the expiring CRP acreage to agricultural production would result in increased small grain production.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the industrial, commercial, and/or agricultural activities and production will occur.</p>
16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.	<p>Action: No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment will occur.</p>
17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?	<p>Action: The proposed action may increase tax revenue from the increased revenues generated via the lease being returned to production.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the state tax base and/or tax revenues will occur.</p>

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?	Action: No impacts to the level of demand for government services are anticipated. No Action: No impacts to the level of demand for government services will occur.
19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?	Action: No impacts to local environmental plans and goals are anticipated. No Action: No impacts to local environmental plans and goals will occur.
20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES: Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through this tract? Is there recreational potential within the tract?	Action: Hunting opportunities for upland game birds, antelope, and deer may be impacted due to the removal of the tame grass stand. No other impacts to recreational or wilderness activities are anticipated. No Action: No impacts to the quality of recreational and wilderness activities will occur.
21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?	Action: No impacts to the density and/or distribution of population and housing are anticipated. No Action: No impacts to the density and/or distribution of population and housing will occur.
22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?	Action: No impacts to the areas social structures and/or traditional lifestyles are anticipated. No Action: No impacts to the areas social structures and/or traditional lifestyles will occur.
23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?	Action: No impacts to the areas cultural uniqueness and/or diversity are anticipated. No Action: No impacts to the areas cultural uniqueness and/or diversity will occur.
24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:	Action: No impacts to the social and economic circumstances are anticipated. No Action: No impacts to the social and economic circumstances will occur.

EA Checklist Prepared By: _____
Matthew Poole (Land Use Specialist)

Date: January 15, 2013

IV. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Action Alternative

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

No Significant Potential Impacts are identified in the EA checklist.
Returning to farm land will enhance school trust revenues.

27. Need for Further Environmental Analysis:

☐ EIS ☐ More Detailed EA ☐ No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By: R. Hoyt Richards Glasgow Unit Manager
Name Title

/s/ Date: January 15, 2013
Signature